

# Traditional burial refuses to die

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

October 31, 2009, 8:27pm

Belonging to a Christian nation, Filipinos have been accustomed to burying their deceased loved ones the traditional way because of the belief that the soul of the departed will continue to be with them even after death.

Aside from this, Filipinos believe that the burial site is a corporeal link between the departed loved one and the family members left behind.

That's why many Filipinos still prefer traditional burial since a buried body means the physical presence of the person they would love to cherish and remember.

However, over the years, traditional burial has been overshadowed by the growing number of people preferring to cremate their loved ones as a way of honoring their dead because of financial consideration. For them, cremation is also "more economical" in the long run.

Cremating the body of a deceased loved one is also gaining popularity among Filipinos because cemeteries — which are found in churchyards and in different municipalities, cities, and provinces all over the country — have started to get overcrowded.

Aside from this, traffic congestion leading to cemeteries and the high cost of burial are also some of the reasons why people are turning their eyes to cremation.

## What is crematory/cremation?

Crematories refer to mortuaries where corpses are cremated or facilities for disposal of human remains by incineration. Recent years saw the rise in the number of crematories in the country.

Cremation may serve as a funeral or post-funeral rite, which is an alternative to the interment of an intact body in a casket. Cremated remains, which are not health risk, may be buried or immured in memorial sites or cemeteries, or they may be legally retained by relatives or dispersed in a variety of ways and locations.

Some people prefer cremation for personal reasons. Others view cremation as a way of simplifying the funeral process.

## The Sanctuary

Francis Cruz, 39, family services coordinator of the Sanctuary, which is located along Araneta Avenue near Quezon Avenue in Quezon City, said their business is a one-stop shop that covers all memorial needs through their 12-step features and services. He said this gives the family of the deceased peace of mind and stability.

Cruz, who graduated from the Polytechnic University of the Philippine (PUP) with a degree in Accountancy, formerly worked at the Manila Electric Company (Meralco) as a customer service representative. He then transferred to the company about four years ago.

Cruz said under its company profile, the 12-storey complex is the largest columbarium not only in the Philippines but in Asia as well. The Sanctuary is the first of its kind in the country and has everything from luxurious vigil chapels with family rooms, a universal chapel, a Buddhist Temple, a Sky Garden at the roof deck, underground secured parking, coffee shops, convenience store, flower shops, an audio-visual library, and a state-of-the-art crematorium.

He said the Sanctuary is packed with all the comforts, luxuries and the security of a five-star hotel. Its inspiring architecture further induces a positive and uplifting atmosphere which would be very welcome in moments of grief, he said.

"The Sanctuary is a total memorial service na lahat ng pangangailangan ng aming mga clients eh nandun na. Ang kagandahan dito, worry-free na ang mga relatives ng deceased person dahil kami na ang bahala sa lahat-lahat," he said.

"Practicality wise, cremation is much cheaper compared to the normal burial and we have different packages to offer our clients," he said.

Based on the Sanctuary's price list, he said relatives of the deceased can choose from a wide array of price packages. He said if a client prefers only a vault for their loved one, the cheapest price would be P115,000 with the most expensive pegged at P165,000.

Under Package 2 (vault and cremation only), the cheapest price would be P130,000 with the most expensive pegged at P180,000. Under Package 3, which consists of a vault, cremation and services, the cheapest price would be P155,000 with the most expensive pegged at P365,000.

He said part of the service is the transport of the deceased to the Sanctuary from the hospital, embalming, use of standard casket for funeral ceremony, the use of vigil chapel, documentation assistance such as taking care of the

registration of death certificates; securing the necessary permits, and other documents plus a checklist of religious rituals which will be provided to the family; audio/video presentation for the necrological services and for a complete memorialization memento, and funeral coach and floral vehicle (optional) for the procession to the cemetery or memorial park and other crematories.

He said the Sanctuarium is a funeral home specializing in cremation.

### **More people prefer cremation**

Ronnie Peterson, a 48-year-old sales representative for Bayer Philippines, said he has already advised his relatives to cremate his remains after his death. He said his decision to be cremated is based on the fact that cremation is much cheaper compared to traditional burial.

"I prefer being cremated tapos yung ash ko ilalagay sa urn na ilalagay naman sa libingan for urns. Para kasi sa akin, mas mura iyun eh," Peterson, who also sidelines as a magician and has five children, told Manila Bulletin in an interview.

"Iyun ang bilin ko sa aking kamag-anak," he added.

EJ Sempani, a Hotel and Restaurant Management (HRM) graduate from the Philippine Women's University, also preferred to be cremated after her death because it's much cheaper compared to traditional burial.

But unlike Peterson who wanted his urn put inside a columbarium, Sempani preferred her urn to be put inside the house of relatives.

### **Filipinos still prefer traditional burial**

Peter de Jesus, funeral director of Nacional Memorial Homes, located on G. Araneta Avenue in Quezon City, said although cremation is a growing alternative to the traditional burial, many Filipinos still prefer the latter.

He said based on monthly figures, about 10 to 15 percent of those they have provided funeral services were cremated while about 85 percent were traditionally buried.

"Hindi rin factor ang financial consideration. Usually, family decision talaga kung bakit pina-cremate ang relative nila or cremation din ang preferred nung tao," he explained.

De Jesus said people prefer to get Nacional Funeral Homes Services because of their rich tradition and the quality of service they provide to their customers. He said another factor is their superior embalming process.

Nacional Funeral Homes was founded in 1900 and has gained the recognition of burying a total of eight Philippine presidents, namely Emilio Aguinaldo, Manuel Quezon, Jose P. Laurel, Elpidio Quirino, Sergio Osmena, Manuel Roxas, Ramon Magsaysay, and Ferdinand E. Marcos. Relatives of Sen. Jambly Madrigal were also buried through the service provide by Nacional.

### **Very cheap memorial service**

Cruz said contrary to the belief of some that traditional burial is expensive, those who lost a loved one could get a memorial service package for as low a price as P35,000. This consists of an air-conditioned viewing chapel room with a seating capacity of 20 to 30 people with refrigerator. The highest memorial service package is P380,000. The package price, however, is subject 12 percent VAT.

"The memorial service package also includes retrieval of remains from the place of death within Metro Manila to Nacional, preparation/embalming, casket, use of viewing chapel for five days (for outside services, rental charges for churches/mortuaries shall be shouldered by the bereaved), securing of transfer/burial/cremation permits and the use of funeral hearse to transport the remains to the burial/cremation place.

He said if the person who died was already a senior citizen, his family will be given a discount.

### **Why traditional burial?**

Jayzl Villafania Nebre, a student at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) with a degree in Bachelor in Business Teacher Education, said he wants to be buried the traditional way as part of his Catholic beliefs.

"Being Catholic, I want to be buried within the prescribed traditional way of burial. Although pinapayagan na ang cremation dito sa atin, it (cremation) is just an alternative way and not the prescribed way," Nebre explained.

Stephany Andem, 22, of Quezon City, said she wants her body to be buried the traditional way also because of her Catholic faith.

"Iyung traditional burial kasi iyung nakasanayan nating mga Pilipino kapag inililibing ang kanilang namatay na relative. Parte na rin ng Catholic belief ko iyun eh," Andem said.

For his part, Andrew Divinagracia, a political science student at the University of Santo Tomas (UST), said he prefers the traditional burial because its more solemn compared to cremation.

“Mas solemn kasi kapag traditional burial and at least may dadalawan ang mga relatives ko,” he said.

### **Cremation not environment friendly?**

Cremation is also preferable to some people for environmental reason. Burial is a known source of certain environmental contaminants, with the coffin itself being the major contaminant. The traditional burial also takes up a great deal of space. Many cemeteries, particularly in Japan and Europe, have ran out, or are starting to run out, of permanent space.

However, there is a growing body of research that indicates that cremation has a significant impact on the environment as well. The major emissions from crematories are nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, particulate matter, mercury, hydrofluoric acid, hydrochloric acid, NMVOCs, and other heavy metals, in addition to persistent organic pollutants (POP).

According to the United Nations Environment Programme report on POP Emission Inventory Guidebook, emissions from crematories contribute 0.2 percent of the global emission of dioxins and furans.

But Beau Bacongus, toxic campaigner of Greenpeace Philippines, said they cannot comment yet on the possible environmental hazards pose by crematories due to lack of information on the process.

“Ang alam kung issue diyan eh ang pag mobilize ng toxic chemicals that’s inside the body. Example eh mga tao na gumamit ng mga makalumang pasta sa ngipin nila. Mga lumang pasta kasi gumamit ng mercury, may toxic chemicals yun eh.”

When asked for comment, Cruz said as far as the Sanctuary is concerned, the process in which they cremate a dead body is environmental friendly.

### **St. Peter Life Plan**

St. Peter Life Plan, Inc. (SPLPI) is a pre-paid deathcare company which offers traditional and affordable life plans to all segments of the society.

Founded by Francisco “Tatay” M. Bautista, on October 27, 1970, it is registered and licensed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and is compliant with all pre-need regulations.

Jonathan B. Vitangcol, who is the assistant vice president and territory head-greater Manila West of St. Peter Life Plan, said contrary to perceptions of some, dying is not that expensive.

He said under their pre-selling memorial services, they give their clients the chance to prepare for their death hassle-free.

He said for as low as P30, 000, one can get a very reasonable memorial plan which is five years to pay.

“After magbayad ng client, the next five years magkakaroon ng goodwill period. Covered na ang lahat from cash assistance benefit, accidental death and dismemberment. Upon avilment of the plan, it is assignable and transferable,” he said.

Ref.: <http://www.mb.com.ph/node/227385/traditional-burial-refu>